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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: Somalia - Violence Spikes in Mogadishu

Classified by Ambassador Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

REF: Nairobi 1029

11. (C) SUMMARY. Between April 19 to 21, there was a spike in violence in Mogadishu with armed confrontation between forces allied with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and armed anti-government elements. The alliances of the anti-government militia remain unclear. Reports indicate that at least 80 persons were killed and over 100 persons injured. While the majority of casualties appear to be civilians, unconfirmed reports also indicate that several TFG and Ethiopian troops were killed as well as al-Shabaab commanders. The TFG claims that it defeated its adversaries, but the heavy-handed tactics of the TFG/ENDF may thwart progress towards reconciliation and direct talks with the opposition. The scale of this fighting is higher than it has been in recent months and may indicate that violent extremists are seeking to exploit perceived weaknesses in the TFG. End Summary.

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Heavy Casualties in Recent Fighting  
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12. (C) The recent spate of violence in Mogadishu began on April 17 when anti-government elements attacked a TFG base on a key road in an attempt to interrupt TFG movement. On April 19, we understand that the TFG began a tactical operation intended to underscore TFG control of the area. In tanks and on foot, ENDF forces reportedly began searches of the surrounding residential area for "terrorists" who were using the neighborhood as a safe haven. Anti-government elements were prepared for the incursion by the TFG/ENDF forces and launched their own attack. In response, Ethiopia used overwhelming force and heavily shelled the neighborhood from which the attack was launched. The fighting continued through April 20 and 21, but subsided the evening of April 21.

13. (C) Unconfirmed reports indicate that at least 85 persons were killed and over 100 injured, the majority of whom were civilians. Our Mogadishu-based contacts have confirmed that three prominent clerics affiliated with the Tabliiq group were killed in a mosque frequented by members of this sect. Our contacts were unable to tell us the exact scale or location of the violence, because reportedly it was too dangerous to go outside. While some suggest that these numbers may be inflated, it is clear that heavy casualties were registered on all sides. We understand that five Ethiopian soldiers were killed and the TFG has told us that at least six al-Shabaab commanders were also killed and several technical vehicles recovered. Both the TFG and the anti-government elements are claiming victory.

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Armed Militia Alliances Unclear  
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14. (C) It is difficult to say who is leading these attacks -- some

reports attribute the strikes to al-Shabaab while others report that militias associated with the former Islamic Courts are behind the recent violence. It is likely that the recent strike is being launched by sub-clan militia that may have certain alliances with both entities. The nature of the attacks is similar to the guerrilla-style tactics that have characterized operations outside the capital where armed elements briefly occupy a town. Outside of Mogadishu, the anti-government forces seem to be variously associated with al-Shabaab, the former Council of Islamic Courts, and independent sub-clan militias (reftel).

15. (C) There are indications that certain anti-government elements are trying to take advantage of the fact that Yusuf is out of the country to challenge TFG control in Mogadishu. Others suggest that rumors of Ethiopian withdrawal and a smaller presence of ENDF forces in the city center have also provided opportunities for militias to assert their relative strength. The scale of the fighting is greater than it has been in recent months and is reminiscent of daily clashes in the early part of 2007 between ENDF soldiers and anti-government elements.

RANNEBERGER